

Commissioner Deborah A. Gist's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, August 5, 2011

Notes from Commissioner Gist:

1. [Teacher of the Year](#) application posted on RIDE Web site
2. Journal story on [educator evaluations](#) required corrections
3. Report published on Rhode Island [funding formula](#)
4. Jamestown signs on as early adopter of [educator evaluations](#)

From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE):

5. RIDE provides guidance on [residency](#), enrollment
6. Workshops scheduled on the R.I. [Alternate Assessment](#)
7. Rhode Island educators urged to provide feedback on [PARCC](#)
8. Registration open for workshops on [Common Core](#) standards
9. Deadline for [certification renewal](#) is August 31
10. [Evaluators](#) required to attend training sessions
11. Application deadline for [Evaluation ISPs](#) is August 12
12. Orientation sessions scheduled for [beginning teachers](#), principals with beginning teachers

From the U.S. Department of Education:

13. [Secretary Duncan](#) calls on teachers to rebuild their profession
14. Information available to educators on teaching about [9/11](#)

From other state agencies:

15. Seminar on [health-care benefits](#) rescheduled

Other:

16. High schools urged to participate in U.S. [Senate Youth Program](#)

Attachments to this field memo:

Action Item Calendar

August 31: Certification-renewal deadline

Notes from Commissioner Gist:

1. Teacher of the Year application posted on RIDE Web site

As I noted to you in last week's Field Memo, one of the highlights of the school year for me is the annual selection of the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year. Every year, we at RIDE are delighted to recognize one of our great teacher for the excellent work they do every day in the classroom, the school, and the community. This year, I would like to have a Teacher of the Year selected from every district in our state, as part of the process of selecting the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year.

I realize that in many districts the selection process for the school and district Teachers of the Year began during 2010-11 school year. If you have not done so yet, it is not too late for you to begin the process of selecting a district Teacher of the Year.

The 2012 Teacher of the Year application is posted on our Web site, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/Recognition/default.aspx>

The Rhode Island Teacher of the Year applications are due at RIDE on Friday, **September 16**. I am working with my staff members to ensure that all districts have the opportunity to participate in this program. Please contact me if you have any questions.

2. Journal story on educator evaluations required corrections

On Sunday, the Providence Journal ran a page-one story on our new educator evaluation system. I was generally pleased with the article, which focused on how the evaluation system will improve instruction and on how educators across the state have been involved with the design and implementation of the system. Here is a link to the story, in case you haven't seen it:

http://www.projo.com/education/content/teacher_evaluations_07-31-11_DIP8I80_v137.6438f.html

Unfortunately, the story contained inaccuracies, which the Journal corrected on Wednesday. Here is the correction published in the Journal:

Under a new system for evaluating teachers developed by the state Department of Education, teachers who receive ratings of “ineffective” for five consecutive years will lose their state certification. And the new evaluation system does not include performance bonuses for top teachers. A story in the Sunday Journal about new evaluations incorrectly reported the required number of inferior ratings and the state of bonus plans.

I appreciate the hard work and the commitment that you and your team have made toward making educator evaluations a success. As the Journal story noted, those districts that participated in the pilot program during the past year warmly praised the evaluation system. As the story noted:

Dozens of teachers who participated in pilot evaluations last spring say they found the process valuable.

“It was a wonderful experience,” said Kathy Thomas, a teacher at Woonsocket Middle School. “My evaluator was very well trained and my hope is to spread the message to the naysayers that there is nothing to be afraid of.”

“I don’t think we can underestimate the extent to which building administrators have to demystify this whole process, because it’s a huge change for folks,” said East Greenwich Supt. Victor D. Mercurio. “It’s not about ‘gotcha,’ it’s about growth. It’s about making you better, not breaking you down.”

Overall, I believe the story had a positive effect, and I continue to look for ways to communicate with educators and to help them understand and appreciate the value of our evaluation system. If I can help you to share with your team any information about the evaluations, please do not hesitate to contact me.

3. Report published on Rhode Island funding formula

The Center for American Progress has published a report by our Dr. Kenneth K. Wong, of Brown University, entitled “The Design of the Rhode Island School Funding Formula.” The Center for American Progress Web site notes that that “the Rhode Island school funding reform experience shows that sound policy, backed up by independent, empirical analysis, can reverse years of political cynicism.” As you may know, Dr. Wong was a great partner to RIDE and provided us with much technical assistance during the design of the formula. You can access Dr. Wong’s report at:

http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/08/rhode_island_reform.html

4. Jamestown signs on as early adopter of educator evaluations

We are thrilled to announce that during the 2011-12 school year, Jamestown Public Schools has joined Warwick to take on the challenge of full implementation of the Rhode Island Model for educator evaluations. While most districts will implement evaluations gradually next year, early-adopter districts will implement the full system, provide a case study on how to successfully implement all components of the evaluation system, collect data on the experiences of educators using the system, and implement the model within the specific context of their districts and schools. The experiences and insights of the early-adopter districts will drive our efforts to refine the model in preparation for the 2012-13 school year. Many thanks to our colleagues in Jamestown and Warwick for helping with this challenging and exciting initiative!

From RIDE:

5. RIDE provides guidance on residency, enrollment

Please see this message from David V. Abbott, Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel:

As the beginning of the school year traditionally brings about many questions on the issue of school residency, I am writing to provide a brief reminder of the process by which residency disputes are to be resolved.

Rhode Island General Law 16-64-6 directs that disputes concerning the residency of students shall be resolved by the Commissioner of Education. In order for the statutory mechanism for resolving residency disputes to operate, a school district must notify the parent(s) or guardian of a student of (1) the reason(s) for the district's refusal to enroll the child in school and (2) the right of the parent(s) or guardian to appeal the district's decision to the Commissioner. It is critical for this notice to be given so that gaps in school attendance can be avoided. I have attached to this Field Memo forms for a written notice, which we request be used in all determinations that a student is *not* a resident of your district, and for a *Spanish translation* of this notice for your use as needed; next week, we will post these forms on the RIDE Web site/Commissioner's page/Commissioner's Advisories. By use of the written notice, parents can quickly determine whether they agree with the reasons for the residency determination and, if not, seek review of this decision at the state level. In this way, students whose school residency is in dispute can receive a timely hearing and not be subjected to prolonged periods out of school.

We would appreciate your cooperation in making sure that appropriate staff in your district have copies of this form and that they use it *whenever* a determination is made of a student's non-residency. Please keep in mind that students already enrolled and in attendance cannot be disenrolled from school while a hearing is pending before the Commissioner, because of the state's compulsory-attendance law.

Legal Guardianship: Please note that our statute R.I.G.L. 16-64-1 provides that a child can establish residency for school purposes even if he lives separate and apart from his

parent and even if he lives with a relative or a person who is not his legal guardian. If a child lives with a person who has not been appointed as his legal guardian but who is acting in loco parentis and the purpose for these living arrangements is for some *substantial reason other than to attend a district's schools*, the student is entitled to enroll. A district cannot condition school enrollment on the appointment of a legal guardian. The guardianship would not necessarily change a child's residency unless the guardian has been appointed for a substantial reason other than to change the child's residency for school purposes.

Completion of semester: Under R.I.G.L. 16-64-8, if a student changes residence prior to the end of the semester, the student shall be allowed to complete the semester in his or her original school district. If the student is a senior or about to enter the senior year, the student shall be allowed to complete the senior year in his or her original city or town of residence.

Homeless Students – Residency for School Purposes: Homeless students receive the protections of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This means that students defined as homeless under the Homeless Assistance Act may request to continue their education in the school district of origin, while under the protection of the Act. Please keep in mind that while students are awaiting placement in a foster home, they are included in the definition of homeless students.

Children Placed in Foster Care: Under R.I.G.L. 16-64-1.1, children placed in foster care are entitled to attend school in the city or town in which they are placed. Children placed in foster care also receive protections under the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. This federal law addresses the needs of these children for educational stability and continuity. Under this law, a foster child is entitled to remain in his or her original school, unless it is not in the child's best interests. If remaining in the school of origin is determined by DCYF not to be in the best interests of the child, then the child must be allowed to enroll in the district where he or she resides with the foster family. A child's "best interests" will be determined by DCYF after all relevant information about the child has been reviewed.

I hope that this brief summary of the residency rules and procedures will be helpful both now and throughout the school year. Any specific questions should be referred to your district's legal counsel. If we can provide you with any additional information, please contact the Chief Legal Counsel Office, at 222-8979, or e-mail Vilma.diorio@ride.ri.gov

6. Workshops scheduled on the R.I. Alternate Assessment

Please see this notice from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

The 2011-12 RIAA Administrators Workshops are the annual workshop for principals, special-education directors, and district test administrators to prepare for the administration of the R.I. Alternate Assessment (RIAA) for the 2011-12 school year. Topics covered will include: a general overview of the RIAA process, what to look for

before signing-off on data folios, review of data from 2010-11, and updates on the GSEG alternate assessment, which will begin development soon.

There will be two sessions:

- August 23, at the URI Center for Biological Sciences, Kingston Campus. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m., with the presentation running from 9 a.m. - noon.
- August 25, at the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative, 640 George Washington Highway, Suite 200, Lincoln. Registration begins at 12:30 p.m., with the presentation running from 1 – 4 p.m.

Registration is available through the workshop calendar on the RIDE Web site, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/ridecalendar.aspx>

7. Rhode Island educators urged to provide feedback on PARCC

Please see this notice from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

We are pleased to announce that our new assessment consortium, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), has just released for public review its draft Model Content Frameworks in English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. These frameworks have been developed through a collaborative, state-led process among PARCC state experts and members of the Common Core State Standards writing teams. The Model Content Frameworks serve several purposes:

- they help identify the big ideas in the Common Core State Standards for each grade level;
- they help determine the focus for the various PARCC-assessment components; and
- they will support the development of the PARCC-assessment blueprints.

This is a great opportunity to provide feedback, and we strongly encourage educators to review the Content Frameworks during the public-review period (August 3 – August 17). We realize that the period for public comment is not long, but it is important that your voices be heard and represented. PARCC is looking for a wide group of interested parties to provide feedback on all parts of the frameworks, including the introductions and the grade-level analyses, which contain suggested areas of emphasis and priority.

By following this link, <http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-content-frameworks>, you will be able to review the draft Model Content Frameworks and provide your feedback through an on-line survey. Thank you for taking your time to support the PARCC initiative and for ensuring that Rhode Island voices are represented.

8. Registration open for workshops on Common Core standards

Please see this notice from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

The Common Core Study of the Standards is in full swing throughout Rhode Island. This workshop is a tool designed to help with statewide transition to the Common Core State Standards. To date, we have reached more than 1,900 educators representing 14 districts. We are well on our way toward our goal of reaching 4,000 educators by September 2012.

Although those who attend the Common Core Study of the Standards are not positioned to replicate training, they will be prepared to be strong instructional supports in their schools. For this reason, we strongly recommend that principals and teacher leaders attend these sessions. More specifically, this group will be equipped to:

- align curriculum to the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts and Literacy Standards;
- identify instructional practices aligned with the Common Core State Standards and Student Learning Objectives; and
- create a culture of professional learning in schools that is aligned with district priorities around the Common Core State Standards transition and educator evaluation.

As LEAs schedule and register participants in Study of the Standards, please remember the vital role building leaders play in these initiatives. We ask that you think carefully regarding registration in order to ensure that principals and teacher leaders attend these sessions. Attendance at the workshop is important and valuable for their school and district.

If you have questions regarding registration or the workshops, please contact Kate Nigh, at kate.nigh@ride.ri.gov or 222-8489.

9. Deadline for certification renewal is August 31

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

It's that time of year again in the certification office! June through October are the busiest months of the year, and we truly appreciate your patience. It takes up to 3 months for certification requests to be resolved. If already-employed educators have applied for certification, remember that you can view the status to verify that they have applied. Currently, the only requirements for renewal of a five-year professional or one-year transitional professional certificate are a completed application and the appropriate fee(s). Please remind educators to apply for renewal prior to the certificate expiration date of **August 31**.

The Cert Priority process is available for new hires in order to ensure that educators hold appropriate Rhode Island certification prior to obtaining employment. As you may know, R.I. General Law requires public-school educators to hold appropriate certification. Please do not use the Cert Priority process for certificate renewals unless there is an extenuating circumstance. If you have any questions, please email us at eqac@ride.ri.gov . Thank you for your support.

10. Evaluators required to attend training sessions

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

Last week, we told you that we would begin to provide you with information about district educators who have registered for training in the educator-evaluation system. This week, you will receive an individual e-mail that includes registration data as of August 4, 2011. We hope that this information will help you communicate with district staff that attendance is required for all evaluators.

11. Application deadline for Evaluation ISPs is August 12

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

We would like to supplement our newly identified Evaluation intermediary-services providers (ISPs) with teachers or administrators currently working in your district. Our intent is to replicate the model we're using for Induction Coaches, that is, hiring the very best applicants to be released from their districts for two years so that they can be trained to provide support to districts across the state. There are two options:

- Releasing an administrator for 90 days each year. We would provide funding for your district to hire a retired administrator to work with the released administrator in order to provide seamless services during their absence.
- Releasing an administrator for the entire year. We would reimburse your district for their salary during this period.

The application packet can be found at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/Docs/ISPEvaluation.pdf>.

The application deadline is **August 12**.

12. Orientation sessions scheduled for beginning teachers, principals with beginning teachers

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

We have just completed a week-long training with the New Teacher Center (NTC) for Induction Coaches. What an incredible group of educators! We (NTC and RIDE) were so impressed. Rhode Island beginning teachers will be so fortunate to have this high-caliber group providing one-on-one support for each of them. Thank you for trusting us and NTC with your best educators.

We have begun to receive data on beginning teachers. Thank you for helping us identify the beginning teachers in our state. As a reminder, it is critical that your human-resource (HR) personnel or an appointed person provide us with new hires (beginning teachers only) information by going to the following link:

<https://sites.google.com/site/riinduction/district-data-entry>.

If for some reason this link does not work for you, a spreadsheet is available to fill out and send back to RIDE. We will be contacting each district HR person to complete the necessary beginning-teacher information forms. Please contact Donna Okrasinski, at donna.okrasinski@ride.ri.gov, to have the spreadsheet e-mailed to you. If your district uses the spreadsheet, please e-mail it back to donna.okrasinski@ride.ri.gov.

The pamphlets for beginning teachers will be sent to each district next week. Please help us make sure all beginning teachers receive this pamphlet by asking your HR personnel to provide the pamphlet to all beginning teachers in your district. If you need more copies or need them sooner, you may download and print it double-sided from:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/mentoring.aspx>.

Beginning Teacher Orientation sessions will be held on August 17 and 18; please have your beginning teachers register. Beginning teachers can register at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/ridecalendar.aspx>.

We have also tentatively scheduled Beginning Teacher Orientation for induction sessions after school on September 1 and September 29. If the beginning teachers have any questions that you are unable to answer, please refer them to either Hilda Potrzeba or Donna Okrasinski.

Registration for Role of the Principal training is also now open. Two dates are currently available: August 16 and September 27. A morning and an afternoon session will be held on each of those dates. Please remind any principals in your district who will have beginning teachers in their building this year that they need to attend a principal session. Their role is critical in beginning-teacher success as well as in the success of this program. Registration information is located at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/ridecalendar.aspx>.

As always, if you have any questions or feedback, do not hesitate to contact Hilda or Donna:

- Hilda Potrzeba, at hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov or 222-8891
- Donna Okrasinski, at donna.okrasinski@ride.ri.gov or 222-8982

From the U.S. Department of Education

13. Secretary Duncan calls on teachers to rebuild their profession

Please see this news from the U.S. Department of Education:

On July 29, in a speech to the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said the U.S. should radically transform the way that teachers are recruited, assigned, evaluated, and compensated, in order to recognize and reward its great veteran teachers, attract top students into the field, and make the country more competitive. He called on teachers to rebuild their profession, to give themselves more autonomy in exchange for performance-based accountability. "Teachers must own this and drive this," he explained. "Change can only come from the men and women who do the hard work every day within our classrooms." He also called for higher salaries to make teaching more competitive with other venerated professions like law, medicine, and engineering. He suggested that starting salaries of around \$60,000 and top salaries approaching \$150,000 would help change the economics of the profession, while acknowledging the difficulty of finding more funding when governments at every level are wrestling with debt and deficits. "I am sure some people will immediately say that we can't afford it without even looking at how to redirect the money we are already spending -- and mis-spending," he observed. "To them I say that there is more than one way to mortgage your future. We can't mortgage our future by under-investing in education." For more information, see:

<http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/working-toward-wow-vision-new-teaching-profession>.

14. Information available to educators on teaching about 9/11

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education:

In just over a month, America will observe the 10th anniversary of September 11; however, many of today's elementary and secondary school students are too young to remember the day and its meaning. To help educators prepare for the difficult but important task of teaching about 9/11, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, the National September 11 Memorial and Museum (<http://www.911memorial.org/>), the Pentagon Memorial Fund (<http://pentagonmemorial.org/>), and the Flight 93 National Memorial (<http://www.flight93memorialproject.org/>) offered a free online conference to provide educators with resources and strategies for addressing the attacks. Discussions with content experts and workshop sessions -- recorded and archived online -- identify resources available at each organization, supply background information on 9/11, and encourage conversations on how to document, preserve, and interpret recent history and current events. For more information, see:

<http://smithsonianconference.org/september11/>.

From other state agencies:

15. Seminar on health-care benefits rescheduled

Please see this notice from Susanne Greschner, Chief of the Division of Municipal Finance:

We have rescheduled the seminar on retiree health care for Tuesday, **August 16**, from 9 - 11a.m. in Conference Room A, in the Department of Administration building. We will discuss the recent legislative changes enacted to enable municipalities to decrease post-retirement benefits liabilities (OPEB). Representatives from the Boston office of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) as well as from the Rhode Island Social Security Office will be attending to answer any questions you may have on Medicare enrollment.

If you have not done so already please let me know of your attendance plans for the seminar, at Susanne.Greschner@dor.ri.gov

Other:

16. High schools urged to participate in U.S. Senate Youth Program

Please see this announcement from the U.S. Senate Youth Program:

Rhode Island Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse announced that the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) has begun its statewide selection process. The two Rhode Island students will join 102 other delegates March 3 - 10, 2012, for the program's 50th Anniversary Washington Week.

Each year, The United States Senate Youth Program brings two students from each state, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity to Washington to experience an intensive week-long educational program about the workings of the Senate and the federal government overall. The USSYP is sponsored by the Senate and fully funded by The Hearst Foundations — no government funds are utilized.

Each of the 104 student delegates will receive a \$5,000 undergraduate college scholarship, in addition to the all-expenses paid trip to the nation's capital. Delegates must be juniors or seniors and elected student officers for the 2011-12 academic year, and they must reside in the state where they attend school.

For more information, see:

www.ussenateyouth.org.

I strongly encourage all high schools to participate in this program by nominating students for this award and scholarship. For information on how to participate, please contact Hayley Jamroz (Hayley.jamroz@ride.ri.gov), in my office.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>